

Preface

This history commemorates an important event in the development of the United States and, especially, of the United States Army Corps of Engineers. In 1936, in response to public demands for federal aid for flood-prone areas of the country and for work relief in the midst of the Great Depression, Congress passed and President Roosevelt signed the first general flood control bill – the first piece of legislation to provide for flood relief throughout the country and to recognize that flood control “is a proper activity of the Federal Government.” Most of the responsibility for planning and designing federal flood control projects was assigned to the Army Corps of Engineers, an agency that had been continuously involved with water resources projects since **1824**. Under the authority of the Flood Control Act of 1936, the Corps has developed into the foremost flood control agency in the nation and has shared its knowledge with many organizations in this country and abroad.

The hundreds of reservoir, levee, and channelization projects that resulted from the 1936 act and subsequent amendments have literally changed the face of the nation. The projects have contributed to both the growth of towns and the protection of rural farmlands. Secondary purposes, such as recreation and water supply, have become more important to an increasingly urbanized nation. There are few areas of the United States that have not received the benefits of these flood control projects.

The billions of dollars saved because of flood control projects have more than repaid the cost of the original construction investment. Today, when designing flood control projects, we attempt to balance the economic benefits against potential damage to the environment. We also are aware that even small projects must depend on an equitable sharing of costs between the federal government and local interests. In fact, new cost-sharing provisions were incorporated into the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 (Public Law 99-662) signed by President Ronald Reagan on 17 November 1986. This law, whose passage owes much to the joint efforts of the Honorable Robert K. Dawson, former Assistant Secretary of the Army, Civil Works,

and a bipartisan coalition of congressmen and senators, established methods to weed out dubious projects, while granting more credibility to supporters of worthwhile proposals. The act thereby represents perhaps the most important change in federal water resources policy since the passage of the 1936 Flood Control Act. However, these shifting political and economic developments should not obscure the one fact that remains constant: the Corps of Engineers' firm commitment to the protection of life and property against natural disasters.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. R. Heiberg III". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "E" and a prominent "H".

E. R. HEIBERG III
Lieutenant General, USA
Chief of Engineers